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"Someone willing to listen to me": Anton de Kom's *Wij Slaven van Suriname* (1934) and the "We" of Dutch Post-Colonial Literature in African American literary context

On board the ship the Rensselaer in 1933 to visit his seriously ill mother and to give speeches on social injustice, Anton de Kom travels the Dutch Atlantic journey in between the family homes of Suriname and the Netherlands.

The opening passage to the final home coming chapter of *Wij Slaven van Suriname* proliferates with images and memories of Surinamese nature and of Dutch social realism, all written from one of the pervasive images of slavery and its aftermath, the ship. He is going to visit the country of his dreams, "Sranang, mijn vaderland," in its duality of Surinamese and Dutch language, one almost mystical, the other factual.[1] He meets Equiano's flying fish, the singing seagulls, and feels the wind breathing with freedom. Buried in those memories on the journey from Ijmuiden to Fort Zeelandia appears also the missing triangular middle passage from Africa. The spell is only broken through the warning notes of modernity's steamboat whistle. He discovers his difference--his children can't use the swimming pool on board-- and class leaves him on deck. In a remarkable passage, De Kom then meets a white stoker:

[1] To this day, Dutch is the official language in Suriname.

> High through the spars and stays of the Rensselaer blow the winds of freedom. On the deck below me, a white stoker comes, but darker than I through the soot of the surfaces and he rushes to his stifling cabin. When he is halfway through the hold, he waves at me and the children. In the blackness of his face laugh the whites of his eyes and the white row of teeth. That, too, is the same everywhere and beautiful everywhere, the comradeship of the proletariat and their love for freedom. (157)[2]

How do we read this image of solidarity between De Kom and the white 'black face' stoker--blacker than De Kom, but white, the white of the eyes and white row of teeth, "the same everywhere and beautiful everywhere"? The kinship he feels unites them, this unique comradeship of the proletarians, united in their love of freedom. The moment of recognition and difference gives De Kom a particular Dutch Atlantic moment of double consciousness, I will argue. One that clearly still reads black and white difference; the stoker is white, black only through his labour, unlike De Kom, who will always be black. At the same time, the eyes don't reflect a Du Boisian mise-en-abyme of self, only seeing images of self in the eyes of the other, but appear to unite in freedom, a genuine togetherness. Here, on board the vessel, in between the Netherlands and Suriname on a fluid sea of waves, De Kom articulates a unique concept of 'Wij," which reconfigures a racial "I' while curiously holding on to it with blackness itself as unitary force—both the stoker and he are 'black.' But the 'wij' also moves across racial borders, invokes the spirit of his mother, travels between Suriname and the Netherlands, and has as its ultimate quest this 'love for freedom.'

In 1934, Anton De Kom publishes *Wij Slaven van Suriname*, translated as *We Slaves of Suriname*.[3] In it, De Kom presents a historical portrait of Suriname, focusing on Dutch slavery and its administration, narrativized in autobiographical, fictional, and political discourses. It is an indictment against the Dutch and an assertion of Surinamese identity, countering Dutch narratives about Suriname and its inhabitants with brutal expositions of

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[2] Hoog, door de stengen en stagen van de Rensselaer waait de wind der vrijheid. Op het dek beneden mij komt een blanke stoker, maar zwarter dan ik door het stof van de vuren en haast zich naar zijn bedompt logies toe. Als hij halfweg de bak is wuift hij naar mij en de kinderen. In het zwart van zijn gezicht lachen het wit van zijn ogen en de blanke rij tanden. Ook dat is overal hetzelfde en overal schoon, de makkerschap der proletariërs en hun liefde tot de vrijheid. (157)

[3] To this date, there is no officially published translation into English of *Wij Slaven*. All translations provided in this article are mine. As mentioned in Alice Boots and Rob Woortman's biography of De Kom, *Anton de Kom: Biografie 1898-1945| 1945-2009* (Amsterdam: Atlas, 2009), De Kom's family have not given permission for the translation by Gert Oostindie for the Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal, Land- en Volkenkunde (KITLV) in Leiden because of the organisation's 'colonial background' (421).

the reality of that rhetoric. As a classic post-colonial book, it speaks back to its colonial representation and offers an alternative representation of the identity of the colonial subject. In spite of De Kom's recognition within Suriname (the University in Paramaribo bears his name, his portrait was on Surinamese currency) and a statue and square in Amsterdam (2006), the book itself remains on the fringes of Dutch culture, studied as part of a post-colonial curriculum at University perhaps, but certainly not part of a Dutch literary canon of the 1930s or of literary modernism, for example.[4]

In 2009, Rob Woortman and Alice Boots, wrote a sizeable biography on De Kom, but to date, no extensive literary analysis of his major book, *Wij Slaven van Suriname*, exists.[5] While Woortman and Boots call De Kom 'this black Multatuli,' the author of probably Dutch literature's most well-known classic, *Max Havelaar* (1860), this problematic designation is not followed up by actually analysing the text of *Wij Slaven*.[6] Instead of putting *Wij Slaven* as a black subsidiary to Multatuli (De Kom is the adjective with no name, only identified by colour), I will look at De Kom's literary achievement in what I consider a more appropriate context. There is no doubt about the literary standing of the anti-colonial text of *Max Havelaar*. However, the author, Eduard Douwes Dekker is a rather privileged and highly educated Dutch author. By no means is *Max Havelaar* a post-colonial text and the authors' backgrounds, concerns, and expressions are fundamentally different, the publication dates are seventy years apart, and the Dutch relationship to Indonesia and its literary history are incomparable.[7] It is like comparing, and this is even within similar years of publication, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) to Du Bois' *Souls of Black Folk* (1903), or Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851) to Frederick Douglass' *Narrative* (1845).[8] In the biography of De Kom, the

[4] Karin Amtmoekrim opens the series "Verzwegen Geschiedenis" (silenced history) for *De Correspondent* with a piece on Anton de Kom. "Over deze Surinaamse held hebben we het te weinig in Nederland," https://decorrespondent.nl/karinamatmoekrim#.

[5] See p. 456. The biography won the Du Perron prize in 2011. For a rather more critical assessment of the biography, see Sandew Hira, "Een Koloniale Biografie over Anton de Kom", *International Institute for Scientific Research*, 25/09/2015, https://iisr.nl/kennisproductie/koloniale-geschiedschrijving/een-koloniale-biografie-over-anton-de-kom/

[6] Multatuli, *Max Havelaar* (London: Penguin, 1987) It is one of the Dutch literature books appearing in Penguin classics.

[7] There is considerable colonial Dutch literature about Indonesia. Most famously perhaps Louis Couperus, *De Still Kracht* (1900).

[8] See how Conrad's 'anti-colonial' text is definitely not post-colonial literature in Achebe's classic essay. Achebe, Chinua. "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness'" *Massachusetts Review*. 18. 1977. Rpt. in *Heart of Darkness, An Authoritative Text, background and Sources Criticism*. 1961. 3rd ed. Ed. Robert Kimbrough, London: W. W Norton and Co., 1988, pp.251-261

authors actually note De Kom's own frustration with Dutch colonial activism focused so much on Indonesia and its lack of attention to Suriname. After Du Perron reads *Wij Slaven*, he calls for a portrait of Indonesia as written by a Javanese who can write about Indonesia from a Javanese perspective—he does not mention Multatuli.[9] Interestingly, the biographers do signal De Kom's enthusiasm for African American literature but there is no further literary research done to follow up that connection as a model for reading *Wij Slaven*.[10]

In this article, I will offer an extensive literary analysis of *Wij Slaven* for the first time. To do that, I will use traditions of African American literature to read and explain some of *Wij Slaven*'s particular literary characteristics as well-known tropes in African American literature. Rather than reading De Kom's reliance on documentary and scholarly evidence as weakness, it is a literary strategy. Rather than seeing the multiple topics and styles in *Wij Slaven* as lack of coherence, it maps on to the multi-varied focalisation of Du Bois's *Souls*, for example. Even the question of authenticity of authorship and his supposed communist allegiances are features of accusations for African American authors, such Douglass, Du Bois, Robeson and others. In addition, I will close-read important ignored passages in *Wij Slaven* for the first time. No one has written on the black-face moment of the stoker. Even more seriously, the vision he has of his mother after she has passed away, does not appear in any work on De Kom, not even the biography. I will suggest that this leads to a radical new inclusive reading of De Kom, invoking a model of listening, symbolized through the inclusive pronoun 'wij' rather than the work of a frustrated 'eenling' (solitaire figure).[11]

De Kom's entry into Dutch and transatlantic literature is crucial, I will argue, precisely because *Wij Slaven* narrates how these intersections go to the heart of Dutch culture and its perceived self-representation. Paul Gilroy's opening sentence in *The Black Atlantic* famously testifies to the Atlantic's movement and changes in national consciousness: "Striving to be both European and black requires some specific form of double consciousness."[12] Applied here to the European Atlantic, Du Bois' metaphor of African American double consciousness provides both a model of self-representation and denotes additional European layers, 'some

[9] See Woortman and Boots, 210.
[10] See Woortman and Boots, 155.
[11] Woortman and Boots, 155. "Het maakt Anton tot een eenling." This is one of the themes of his portrait in the biography, which also extensively refers to De Kom by his first name only.
[12] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Verso: London, 1993), 1.

specific form.' Kwame Nimako and Glenn Willemsen discuss this 'specific form' in *The Dutch Atlantic*, where they dissect various interconnections of the Dutch Atlantic narrative, rather than focus only on transactions (was it profitable?). Instead, they propose the idea of "parallel histories and intertwined belonging" to counter singular Dutch master narratives.[13] As they point out, "the captives shared the same ship as their captor" (5) and that intertwining has consequences not just for the captives but the captors as well—treaties are written to regulate the Atlantic, influencing nation formation; ownership of the enslaved in the Netherlands or in Suriname constitutes new relationships; and even receiving the exchanged products on the Atlantic journeys is evidence of intertwining relationships. Representing such a Dutch black Atlantic in literature requires, to use Gilroy's phrase, "a special form." And it's precisely that idea of form that is central to the De Kom's *Wij Slaven*; its 'form' is always part of the discussion; however, not as a celebration of innovation to discuss Dutch 'intertwined belongings' or of Dutch literary modernism but as grounds for exclusion from what constitutes Dutch literature.

As an example, one of the foremost scholars and champions of De Kom, Peter Meel writes,

> *Wij Slaven van Suriname* is not a scholarly achievement, although it bears some of the characteristics of a historical work, such as the use of primary and secondary sources and the employment of a Surinamese perspective. Yet De Kom never intended to address academia nor had as his prime motive to add to the existing body of scholarly literature on Suriname [….] *Wij Slaven van Suriname* continues to be included in scholarly debates, while the author himself never had these intentions. This remains a major source of confusion about De Kom's book.[14]

He adds further that the 'hybridity' of De Kom's style allows for identification with the fate of the 'lower class Surinamers' (261). What's interesting here is that 'scholarship' only appears to function in relation to its supposed intended audiences and that the classifications of 'hybridity' and 'confusing' work to exclude the book almost from

[13] Kwame Nimako and Glenn Willemsen, *The Dutch Atlantic: Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation* (London: Pluto, 2011), 8.

[14] Peter Meel, "Anton de Kom and the Formative Phase of Surinamese Decolonization," *New West Indian Guide*. Vol. 83, no 3&4 (2009), 269.

scholarship and instead restricts it to evocations of sympathy.[15] In fact, its 'hybridity' and 'confusing' classification in Dutch scholarship brings out the problem of classification in the first place. In their biography, Woortman and Boots suggest that the book "deals with too many subjects."[16] For Meel, De Kom figures in 'the accuser's role' (270) and the entire book becomes classified according to that narrative. In contrast, Michiel van Kempen includes *Wij Slaven* in his monumental *History of Surinamese Literature* (2006), where he challenges Du Perron for his assertation that *Wij Slaven* "was not meant as literature." To Van Kempen, De Kom's book is literature and a "radical re-writing of Surinamese history" (171). He notes in particular De Kom's style and language use, which "certainly does not reflect a factual-historical style nor even a journalistic one" (172) and he notes the essay-like form of the book as something that has not been addressed.[17] It is precisely that hybridity of form and its challenging classification that clearly points to a different literary tradition.[18] Most obviously, the form resembles that of Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), with chapters and sections on economics, sociology, biographical life writing, autobiography, fiction, and cultural criticism. Gilroy describes it perfectly as a "self-consciously polyphonic form," suggesting that this "distinct blend was also an important influence on the development of black literary modernism" (115).[19]

One would expect the book then to become central to a post-colonial discourse within Dutch criticism. However, as many critics have noted, there is no real post-colonial literary criticism in the Netherlands, where the category of post-colonialism itself is relegated to another 'fragmented' category. Ulbe Postma assesses the absence of a post-colonial debate in the Netherlands as follows:

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[15] Many critics sum up the 'hybrid' nature of De Kom's *Wij Slaven*. See, for example, Phaf, Ineke, et al. "Caribbean Imagination and Nation-Building in Antillean and Surinamese Literature." *Callaloo*, no. 34, 1988, pp. 148–171. "He mixes into his historical analysis considerable autobiographical data" (158).

[16] *Anton de Kom*, 173.

[17] "Aan die essayistische kant *Wij Slaven* is praktisch altijd voorbijgegaan."

[18] Many critics note form, fragmentation, and hybridity as characteristics which complicate *Wij Slaven*'s literary or historical qualification. See for example, Alex van Stipriaan, "Slavery in the Dutch Caribbean: The books no one has read," in *Beyond fragmentation: Perspectives on Caribbean history: Slavery in the Dutch Caribbean*, eds., Editors: Juanita de Barros, Audra Diptee, David W. Trotman, (Portland: Markus Wiener, 2006) chapter 3 pp.69-92, 70.

[19] Interestingly, in a description of the book on the "letterfonds website," a link to Du Bois' *Black Reconstruction in America* is suggested, but nothing about the obvious structural similarities with *Souls*. http://www.letterenfonds.nl/en/book/1146/we-slaves-of-suriname.

> It is fragmented everywhere, but what is missing in the Dutch case is the ambition to achieve an overarching theoretical perspective on its colonial legacy. Absent is the idea that other post-colonial immigrant groups might have the same type of post-colonial questions and that these questions may be relevant to Dutch society at large. On the contrary, there is some irritation about the Anglophone post-colonial debate, as it is considered over-theoretical and somewhat pretentious.[20]

Post-colonial criticism itself, it is suggested, does not map on to the Dutch experience. Gert Oostindie even wonders "whether it is really regrettable that the Netherlands developed little in the way of an Anglo-Saxon postcolonial studies tradition," calling for "empirical" research rather than "uncompromising political correctness."[21] As a Dutch Anglophone critic, based in the UK, educated in The Netherlands and the US, I will examine fragmentations, Atlantic critical journeys, moving across intersections at every corner of the world, something Dutch traders and captains of its various trading and warships did for many centuries. I propose we look at literary traditions across the Atlantic contextualise *Wij Slaven*'s hybrid status, focuses firmly on the West rather than the East of *Max Havelaar.*

African American tradition and its entry into American literature: a model for Dutch intertwining.

The arguments about the literary, historical, economic, and political classification of *Wij Slaven* in fact resonate with themes within African American literature. De Kom himself was clearly influenced by African American civil rights struggles of the 1920s and 1930s. Kwando Kinshasa details De Kom's involvement in the Scottsboro case:

> In a series of interviews on Dutch radio and in leftist newspapers, de Kom and Mrs. Ada Wright, the mother of two of the Scottsboro defendants, discussed American racism and the repressive aspects of a judiciary that was bent on executing these

[20] Ulbe Postma, "Why is there no post-colonial debate in the Netherlands, in *Post-Colonial Immigrants and Identity Formation in the Netherlands*, ed. by Ulbe Postma (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 2012), 193-212, 202.

[21] Gert Oostindie, *Postcolonial Netherlands: sixty-five years of Forgetting, Commemorating, Silencing* (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 2011), 236-7.

nine youths. This was an experience that made de Kom acutely aware of the comparative aspects of colonialism and racism in the United States and Holland.[22]

In one of the documentaries on *De Kom*, we see Magdeleine Paz's *Omdat ik zwart ben* (*Frère Noire*, 1933), a book on American racism, on a coffee table.[23] Marcus Garvey's back to Africa project was well known in the Caribbean, and W.E.B. Du Bois himself spent considerable time in Europe during the 20s and 30s, for example at the 1921 Pan-Africa congress in London. As Van Kempen demonstrates, the context of the Black Movement and Negritude are felt throughout the early twentieth century in Surinamese writings, and while perhaps not overly influential according to him, the movements were certainly noticed.[24] De Kom's writing has more in common with that American tradition than to a non-existent Dutch one. Woortman and Boots suggest: "Contrary to his American spiritual companions, in his own country, Anton stands alone."[25] And they uncover a spiritual De Kom wrote in English around 1934 as well as a poem "Lynch" about the three arsonists of Paramaribo (who also feature in *Wij Slaven*), published in *Links Richten*, with a Langston Hughes poem translated by Jeff Last in the same edition.[26] Stunningly, in response to a request from a Jenny Reitsma in the US with a suggestion to translate *Wij Slaven* into English because black Americans would be interested, he responds with a request for assistance in obtaining a scholarship for a US University for eight to nine months, allowing him to lecture, attend lectures, and study for a degree in 1937.[27] His connection to Otto Huiswoud, moreover, connects him firmly to the Harlem Renaissance as he published a piece on Suriname in Huiswoud's journal *The Negro Worker* in 1934.[28] There is plenty of evidence that De Kom

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[22] Kwando M. Kinshasa, "From Surinam to the Holocaust: Anton de Kom, a Political Migrant," *The Journal of Caribbean History* 36.1 (2002): 33-68. 57

[23] Zichem, Frank. *Wij Slaven van Suriname*. RVU Educatieve Omroep en Vanzetti Produkties, Amsterdam. Documentary, 1999. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KN8PvEMx2c. In the biography Anton de Kom, Paz's book is in the bookcase (see page 230).

[24] Michiel van Kempen, *Een geschiedenis van Suriname*, 109-115. "Grote invloed hebben deze Amerikaanse bewegingen in Suriname nooit gehad, maar ze zijn ook niet onopgemerkt voorbijgegaan" (109).

[25] *Anton de Kom*, 155. "In tegenstelling tot zijn Amerikaanse geestverwanten staat Anton als zwarte auteur alleen."

[26] Langston Hughes's essay, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," *The Nation* (1926), became a manifesto for the Harlem Renaissance, elucidating how writing about black experience would not limit the artist as artist in America. The parallels with De Kom's own struggles and legacy as black writer in the Netherlands are uncanny. https://www.modernamericanpoetry.org/content/langston-hughes-negro-artist-and-racial-mountain-1926

[27] *Anton de Kom*, 150-2; 251.

[28] *Anton de Kom*, 203. See the Otto en Hermine Huiswoud archive in the Black Archives in Amsterdam. http://www.theblackarchives.nl/the-huiswoud-collection.html

was familiar with African American movements and his desire to travel to the US. And that connection is also there in the methodology of *Wij Slaven* and the challenges to ideas of national literature formation. From the invocation of the American slave narrative to Du Bois' genre busting in *Souls of Black Folk* to the embracing of a socialist agenda and activism, De Kom's book challenges Dutch literary cohesion in the profound ways African American literature has challenged the idea of American literature and its 'canon.'

The challenges to American cultural representations in its canonical literature, especially that of F.O. Matthiessen's original *American Renaissance*, from a feminist and ethnic perspective, has produced a different America in the academy.[29] Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* (1992) has been immensely influential in articulating a construction of American literary whiteness, which uses ideas of blackness to define itself. As she suggests: "equally valuable is a serious intellectual effort to see what racial ideology does to the mind, imagination, and behaviour of masters" (12). How dominant racial ideology operates has an effect on racial formations, both in mind and behaviour. Such an interaction between races and its dominance of a racial ideology leads Du Bois to articulate the concept of 'double consciousness':

> After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, —a world which yields him no true selfconsciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, —an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (3)

The phrase, " this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of the others, of measuring one's soul by the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity," highlights the damaging gaze to 'one's soul,' one that articulates and formulates a self born out of contempt and pity. De Kom describes that sensation of having internalized the white gaze as

[29] F.O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*. (New York: Oxford UP, 1941).

a specific reason for writing the book, rebuilding a different sense of self based on self-respect:

> No people, who remain burdened with an inherited sense of inferiority, can realize their full potential. That is why this book seeks to awaken the self-respect of the Surinamese and furthermore to show the inaccuracy of the peace intentions of the Dutch during the time of slavery.[30]

The idea of remaining 'buried with an inherited sense of inferiority' of course also traverses similar geographies as those of Martinique postcolonial theorist Franz Fanon in *Black Skins, White Masks*.[31] De Kom articulates his purpose clearly: "awaken the self-respect" and "show the inaccuracy….of the Dutch."

In order to apply Morrison's examination of racial ideology in dominant US culture through its interactions with race, I would like to turn to an examination of the 'master narrative' of Dutch racial relations and its depiction of Dutch slavery, where De Kom's book can expose 'the inaccuracy' of that narrative. In *White Innocence*, Gloria Wekker argues that Dutch white culture has enacted particular strategies to deal with race:

> Forgetting, glossing over, supposed color blindness, an inherent and natural superiority vis-à-vis people of color, assimilating; broadly speaking, the main Dutch models that are in operation where interaction with racialized/ethnicized others is concerned.[32]

Wekker demonstrates these strategies at work in the academy, in the workplace, and in everyday cultural practice with examples from a range of experiences, deeply personal ones to government practice. Such cultural interaction with 'racialized others' travels along the same axis as the intertwining of the black Atlantic. But rather than the moment of recognition and solidarity on board de Rensselaer between De Kom and the black face stoker, black face itself is part of a tradition of differentiation in Dutch popular culture, reinforcing "us and them." As in almost any discussion of race in Dutch society, Wekker

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[30] "Geen volk kan tot volle wasdom komen, dat erfelijk met een minderwaardigheidsgevoel belast blijft. Daarom wil dit boek trachten het zelfrespect der Surinamers op te wekken en voorts de onjuistheid aantonen van de vredesbedoelingen der Hollanders ten tijde der slavernij" (50-1).

[31] Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. As Fanon declares: "The feeling of interiority of the colonized is the correlative to the European's feeling of superiority. Let us have the courage to say it outright: *It is the racist who creates his inferior*" (69). *Black Skin, White Masks*, transl Charles L. Markman (London: Pluto Press, 2008; orig. 1967, Grove Press).

[32] Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (London: Duke UP, 2016), 15.

dissects the Zwarte Piet (Black Pete as part of the Sinterklaas festivities) discussion via those anchored and differentiating models of racial interaction. Wekker provocatively assert that a dominant Dutch

> discourse stubbornly maintains that the Netherlands is and always has been color-blind and antiracist, a place of extraordinary hospitality and tolerance toward the racialized/ethnicized other, whether this quintessential other is perceived as black in some eras or as Muslim in others. One of the key sites where this paradox is operative, I submit, is the white Dutch sense of self. (1)

Anton de Kom's book challenges that main discourse on many fronts, one of the reasons why Meel classifies it as 'accusatory.' But as such it fits into an 'us and them' paradigm that actually upholds a Dutch racial classification system, performed ritually through the black face Zwarte Piet. As Wekker elucidates:

> I am aware of the double bind before me: 'If you do not go along with the dominant consensus that Zwarte Piet is harmless and innocent, you cannot be one of us,' In subscript, and in a lower key: 'Yet, even if you do accept him, you still are not one of us.' Between 'Black Pete is not racist' and the fall back position 'We do not mean it to be racist,' not much space is left for critical self-reflection on the cultural archive. (147)

Kwame Nimko notes a similar 'us and them' paradigm surrounding comparative international migration and ethnic relations within a European context: "What stands out in this mode of research is the use of the insider-outsider paradigm—'us versus them'—as the starting point. The 'us' represents 'white' Europeans; the 'them' represents the 'Other.'"[33] Yet De Kom's 'Wij' encompasses the black face white Dutch stoker in a moment of recognition of both difference and similarities, and ultimately as a 'wij.' *Wij Slaven* travels along an imaginary ocean of an 'us and them'/'home and other'/'black and white' and other opposite shores; his book succeeds in bridging this cultural transatlantic opposition, thus challenging the construction of a uniform Dutch cultural identity.

Dutch Master Narrative: White Innocence

[33] Kwame Nimako, "About Them, But Without Them: Race and Ethnic Relations Studies in Dutch Universities," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, X, Issue 1, Winter 2012, 45-52. 47

Wekker's articulation of a Dutch main discourse surrounding slavery and legacy finds ample support in scholarship. Sandew Hira in "Decolonizing the Mind" cites some extraordinary examples of what Wekker has identified as that main discourse of Dutch white innocence. In his analysis of colonial scholarship in the Netherlands, for example, one of the strands of that argument is that the role of the Dutch in slavery was almost insignificant. He cites Piet Emmer's argument in *Between Slavery and Freedom* (2000) about the lack of revolts in Suriname during slavery.[34] In its depiction of the grand narrative of Dutch history, Joke Kardux shows, the Dutch main discourse anchors itself in the "Golden Age" when the Dutch VOC ruled the seas, leading to prosperity and high art, rather than about imperialism and slavery. She also invokes Emmer who claimed that space for the enslaved on the slave ships resembled a Boeing 747 economy seat. And there is the prevailing narrative that Dutch people were actually not involved in the physical side of slavery but rather that it was mainly outsourced: "In fact, most them owned only shares in plantations and thus in slaves. Even those who directly profited from slavery and the slave trade, then, had little or first-hand experience of its everyday reality."[35] Nimako and Willemsen articulate such a Dutch master narrative as a 'self-image'. Dutch involvement in the transatlantic slave system "does not correspond to the self-image of the Dutch master narrative, namely, a culture of tolerance, freedom and democracy" (157). As evidence of Dutch difference, often a paragraph about the "clean and neat" Dutch slave-ships from the seventeenth century is offered to denote supposed humanitarianism.[36] As is clear here, evidence is gleaned from the coloniser's documents and reliability from these archives present clear problems of perspective; in addition, Dutch historians almost point to the accusing finger for slavery to the Africans themselves, arguing that the Dutch only enslaved those who had been enslaved

[34] Hira, Sandew. "Decolonizing the Mind: The Case of the Netherlands." *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*. X Issue 1, Winter 2012, 53-68. 58

[35]James Oliver Horton and Joke Kardux, "Slavery and the Contest for National Heritage in the United States and the Netherlands, *American Studies International*. Vol 42. No 2/3 (June-October 2004), 64.

[36] VOC slave trader Willem Bosman, as cited in Postma (2003, 126): "You will really wonder to see how these slaves live on board, for though their number sometimes amounts to six or seven hundred, yet by the careful management of our masters of ships they are so regulated that it seems incredible. And in this particular our nation exceeds all other Europeans; for as the French, Portuguese, and English slave-ships are always foul and stinking, on the contrary ours are for the most part clean and neat" (Cited in *The Dutch Atlantic*, 24-5). Further commentary is offered in Kwame Nimako, Amy Abdou and Glenn Willemsen, "Chattel Slavery and Racism: A Reflection on the Dutch Experience," *Thamyris/Intersecting* No. 27 (2014), 33-52. "In other words, the Dutch treated their captives better than the French, Portuguese, and English. The assumption being that it was legitimate to enslave Africans provided that they were treated with Dutch care" (39).

by the Africans, obscuring the difference between 'banditry' and institutionalized slavery.[37] Analyses also revolve around profitability models of the supposedly relatively small involvement in the black Atlantic. In response to Emmer's article in the Dutch Newspaper *de Volkskrant* of July 5, 2012, entitled, "The slave trade was not that profitable," Artwell Cain identifies that analysis as part of a Dutch main discourse of denial, aimed "to cast doubt on any assertions that challenge the narrative of Dutch innocence in the history of the slave trade."[38] Karwan Fatah-Black and Mattias van Rossum, however, question even those economic models, for its failure to examine economic stimuli and how "trade, power, and violence are intrinsically linked."[39] Cain sums up this main Dutch discourse of denial—and remember this is as recently as 2015—as follows:

> A Dutch narrative of denial includes assertions that the Dutch trade was less than 5 percent of the total of trans-Atlantic operations, and African sovereigns played key roles in enslaving other Africans (Oostindie 2001; Weiner, 2014b). Principal narratives of history in the Netherlands elide memories and responsibility for past involvement in the slave trade while celebrating the commercial successes of Dutch culture. (232)

The dominance of such a Dutch master narrative of innocence and denial is summed up by Nimako, Abdou and Willemsen as a "bookkeeping model": "By employing what can only be described as a bookkeeping model, the Dutch master narrative tacitly accepts slavery as a legitimate business, reflecting on the profits, losses, and sometimes, bad luck endured by the WIC [West Indische Companie]."[40] Inadvertently perhaps, the focus on bookkeeping and supposed tolerance built on religious freedom in this Dutch master narrative returns in discussion of Dutch slavery from outside its shores.

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[37] See also *The Dutch Atlantic* for a discussion of a lack of empirical evidence (48) and the difference between African banditry and institutionalized slavery; Enrique Salvador Rivera in a review essay entitled "Whitewashing the Dutch Atlantic," also points to the 'shoddy evidence' of some of the colonial data (126). "Whitewashing the Dutch Atlantic," *Social and Economic Studies* 64: 1 (2015), 117-132. For historians emphasizing the Africans' role, see especially Emmer, *Between Slavery and Freedom*.

[38] Artwell Cain, "Slavery and Memory in the Netherlands: Who Needs Commemoration"? *Journal of African Diaspora Archaeology and Heritage*, 4;3, 227-242, 229. Emmer's opinion article can be accessed here, https://www.volkskrant.nl/columns-opinie/-zo-winstgevend-was-slavenhandel-niet-~b089591f/.

[39] See also Karwan Fatah-Black and Mattias van Rossum, "Beyond Profitability: The Dutch Transatlantic Salve Trade and its Economic Impact," *Slavery and Abolition*, vol 36, no 1, 2015, 63-83; they question even those economic models, for its failure to examine economic stimuli and how "trade, power, and violence are intrinsically linked" (80).

[40] Kwame Nimako, Amy Abdou and Glenn Willemsen, "Chattel Slavery and Racism: A Reflection on the Dutch Experience," *Thamyris/Intersecting* No. 27 (2014), 33-52, 35.

The Dutch Master Narrative Abroad

The Dutch self-image of a benign non-involved slavery is very different from its international cultural image. In John Gabriel Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Slaves of Surinam* (1796) and Aphra Behn's *Oronooko* (1688), the Dutch slave owners and traders are singled out for their cruelty, dishonesty, and almost sadistic behaviour.[41] Stedman's own Dutch/British nationality, his enlightenment belief in science as the dispassionate observer of facts, and his meticulous diary keeping during his time in Suriname make him one of the most reliable writers on Dutch slavery; Stedman illustrated the book with his own paintings, engraved by artists, such as William Blake. These iconic images still testify to the horrors and legacies of Dutch slavery in Suriname and are known throughout the world; this William Blake plate features a Dutch slaver in all its glory.[42]

Another damning portrait of Dutch slavery in Suriname occurs in Voltaire's *Candide* (1759). In this classic novella, narrating the hypocrisy of enlightenment culture, the Dutch are singled out for their cruel slavery and scrupulous trade deals, portrayed by Mijnheer

[41] Behn, Aphra, *Oroonoko: Or the Royal Slave*. 1688. Printed Gutenberg Edition. Feedbooks, 2018. *Oroonoko* blasts European 'whiteness' and their civilization. For example, "There was no faith in the white men, or the gods they adored; who instructed them in principles so false that honest men could not live amongst them" (57).

[42] John Gabriel Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, ed. Richard Price and Sally Price (New York: Open Road Distribution, 2016, c1796). In Dutch scholarship, Stedman is regarded as British (Scottish even) but a major new Dutch biography, Roelof van Gelder, *Dichter in de Jungle* (Amsterdam: Atlas, 2018) should change that perception; William Blake archive, https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/john-stedmans-narrative-of-a-five-years-expedition-against-the-revolted-negroes-of-surinam-with-engravings-by-william-blake

Vanderdendur, trader, brutal slave owner, and cheater; Voltaire's portrait of the limbless slave in Suriname has become an icon of the evils of 18th century slavery.[43]

The analysis of 18th century Dutch culture from abroad is rather different from that of the 'main discourse' of Dutch white innocence and its portrayal of slavery. Dutch slavery, according to Voltaire, explicitly interlinks Dutch trading expertise ('famous merchant"), brutality disguised as justice (cutting off of limbs), dishonesty (cheating to make a profit), and religion (conversion as pacifier) as unique characteristics of Dutch slavery in Suriname. When Gert Oostindie assesses Voltaire's portrayal of Dutch slavery in Suriname as an example of the most brutal form of slavery, he notes that other international critics, often referring to Tannenbaum's assessment in *Slavery and Citizen* (1946), confirm this reputation. "Small wonder, then, that twentieth-century scholarship has often denounced Suriname as the most disgusting variant of New World slavery" (2). It is especially interesting that Oostindie links Tannenbaum's ranking to "his views regarding the crass materialism and inhumanity of protestant capitalist."[44][45] Even Pieter Emmer cannot entirely shake the bad reputation abroad, instead arguing that it was the same across the Caribbean and that Europe suffered rampant inequality and poverty as well; while he states that this bad reputation is built on "quicksand," and that punishments were for those who tried to escape (never a word about sexual abuse or the enslaved's conditions), he does acknowledge that Stedman did not lie.[46] The classic international portrait of Dutch slavery in *Candide* does actually map almost seamlessly onto De Kom's analysis of the particular Dutch institution of slavery.

What is often ignored, or treated entirely separately from the Dutch role in transatlantic slavery, is the Dutch role and its legacy in North American slavery, nation

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[43] Voltaire, *Candide*. (New York: Boni and Liveright, inc, 1918.Project Gutenberg). http://www.gutenberg.org/files/19942/19942-h/19942-h.htm (date accessed January 29, 2019)

[44] Gert Oostindie, "Voltaire, Stedman and suriname slavery," *Slavery and Abolition*, 14:2, 1993, 24.

[45]For John Besseling, Voltaire's literary portrait was more linked to demonstrating the "immorality" of the Dutch slavers, rather than the system of Dutch slavery itself. Together with this 'bad master's defense," the attention is more to Voltaire's historical relationship to governor Mauricius and Voltaire's fight with his Dutch publisher John Besseling, "Voltaire, Joan Jacob Mauricius en de Surinaamse slavernij," *Mededelingen van de Stichting Jacob Camp Weyerman*, Jaargang 36, Nummer 2 (zomer 2017), 29 (immoraliteit), 24 (uitgever).

[46] P.C. Emmer, *Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse Slavernij* (Amsterdam: Nieuw Amsterdam, 2019), 206-7. There are some further assertions here that raise eyebrows. The cruelty and sadism cannot have been true because it wouldn't made economic sense, for example. "Veelvuldige verminking van de doodslag op hun slaven waren contraproductief. Alleen al deze economische beperking maakt het onwaarschijnlijk dat het slavenregime in Suriname veel hardvochtiger is geweest dan elders" (206).

formation, and African American identity formation. The Dutch role in the black Atlantic does not confine itself to the Caribbean, they are deeply involved in the system of slavery in North America as well as early 17th century settlers. The colony New Amsterdam was actually formally exchanged for Suriname in the Treaty of Breda (1667). As I write this during America's black history month in 2019, numerous newspapers cite 400 years of slavery, starting with the "20 and odd negroes" arriving in Jamestown, Virginia on a Dutch man of war vessel.[47] As a particular telling example of the Black Atlantic and Europe, this event typified a European multinational endeavour, with the English ship *the White Lion* flying under a Dutch flag (from Vlissingen), having teamed up with *The Treasurer* (an English warship) to capture the cargo (Africans) from a Portuguese vessel.[48] *The New York Times*, with 'The 1619 Project,' has suggested that American culture started perhaps not with the Puritans at Plymouth but at this moment in Jamestown in 1619.[49] The Dutch appear in North American slave narratives as well. In the first English Slave Narrative, *Narrative in the life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw (1772)*, James Albert is enslaved by prominent Dutch settlers and ministers, Van Horn and Jacobus Frelingshuysen in New Amsterdam; James Albert speaks Dutch; when he goes to England, he is sent to the Netherlands around 1753 to be examined for the veracity of account: "So I stood before 38 ministers every Thursday for seven weeks together, and they were all very satisfied, and persuaded I was what I pretended to be."[50] The Dutch reformed church is not there to verify the horrors of slavery in an anti-Abolitionist tradition of which there was hardly any in the Netherlands, but to examine the accounts of his conversion, and to confirm "I was what I pretended to be"—quite a complex self/other image.[51] Another famous African American abolitionist,

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[47] See for example the *Washington Post*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/retropolis/wp/2018/08/24/slaverys-bitter-roots-in-1619-20-and-odd-negroes-arrived-in-virginia/?utm_term=.ff48c9711b74

[48] See for example, Sluiter, Engel. "New Light on the '20. and Odd Negroes' Arriving in Virginia, August 1619." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 54, no. 2, 1997, pp. 395–398. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2953279.

[49] *New York Times*, "The 1619 Project." August 14, 2019.https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html

[50] James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, *A narrative of the most remarkable particulars in the life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African prince* (Leeds: Davies & Co, 1810; 1772 orig.), 25; see also, Ryan Ryan Hanley, "Calvinism, Proslavery and James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw," *Slavery & Abolition*, 36:2, 3(2015) 60-381, DOI: 10.1080/0144039X.2014.920973; This scene sounds utterly bizarre and it would be interesting to find records of this 'examination' in Dutch archives.

[51] For this lack of an abolitionist tradition in The Netherlands, see for example, *The Dutch Atlantic*, 90-94. Twenty-nine emancipation motions were rejected from 1855 until the Bill passed 9 July, 1862 and was signed by King William III, August 1862. (94).

Sojourner Truth, was enslaved by a Dutch family, and spoke Dutch as her first language.[52] And when Toni Morrison reimagines the birth of American culture during American colonial times in *A Mercy* (2008), she places Dutch farmer Jacob Vaark, who enslaves Florens, as the builder of the new American house.

Even W.E.B. Du Bois highlights his conflicted Dutch heritage in all his autobiographies; Du Bois's African ancestor, Tom (born around 1730), was "stolen by Dutch slave traders," served "Coonraet Borghardt" and probably spoke Dutch.[53] Du Bois cherishes his maternal line of the black Burghardts who in lived the Great Barrington region for 200 years. His transatlantic heritage, spanning French Huguenot, North American, and Haitian ancestry on his father's side and clear Dutch and African roots from his mother's side (his maternal ancestor is also African, described as a small Bantu woman, whose song still lives on in the Burghardt family—"the voice of exile") contribute in no small part to his classic formulation of double consciousness.[54] The Dutch Burghardt family name profoundly relates to his sense of self[55]; he publishes as W.E. Burghardt Du Bois and his letter to Harvard opens with "My name is William Edward Burghardt Du Bois."[56] In "The Passing of the First Born," he describes the infant death of his only son, named Burghardt. The Dutch marks of its transatlantic legacy in slavery live on in the past and present as an intertwined transatlantic cultural discourse of race.[57]

The centrality of the evil Dutch slave merchant and settler of course differs profoundly from that of the Dutch innocence narrative. De Kom explicitly interrogates the Dutch representation of slavery to demonstrate its imbrications in Dutch culture. Telling this story takes many forms in *Wij Slaven*, and is an explicit reason for the crossing of genres.

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[52] See Jeroen Dewulf, "The Many Languages of American Literature: Interpreting Sojourner Truth's *Narrative* (1850) as Dutch-American Contact Literature," *Dutch Crossing*, 38:3, 22(2014) 0-234, DOI: 10.1179/0309656414Z.00000000059

[53] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. DuBois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century* (New York, NY: International Publishers Co. Inc., 1968), 61. See also *Souls* (157), *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (Millwood, New York: Kraus-Thomson, 1975, c1920).

[54] W.E.B. Du Bois, *Souls*, 157. In *Darkwater*, he exclaims, "but, thank God, no 'Anglo Saxon'" (9).

[55] See especially, David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race*, 1868-1919 (New York: Henry Holt, 1993), chapter 2. Jessie Fauset's portrait of Du Bois in *Plum Bun* also accentuates his Dutch heritage; she names him Van Meier. *Plum Bun: A Novel without Morals* (New York: Oshun Publishing, 2013, c 1928).

[56] Herbert Aptheker, *The Correspondence of W.E.B. Du Bois*, vol 1, selections, 1877-1934 (Amherst: U Mass Press, 1973), 15.

[57] Du Bois writes on the Dutch Slave trade in his PhD thesis, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of American 1638-1870* (c1896), in *Du Bois: Writings*. (New York: Library of America, 1986), 24-5. For more on Dutch early settler history and its double legacy, see Joyce D. Goodfriend, "Merging the Two Streams of Migration to New Netherland," *New York History*, vol 92. No 3 (Summer 2011), 133-149.

Rather than a Dutch 'outsourcing' of actual slavery and implicitly stated ignorance of the cruelties imposed on the enslaved (a defence which has eerie connotations with, "I did not know"), De Kom demonstrates full complicity at home and abroad of the Dutch; there is no innocence. The Dutch discourse of tolerance, justice, and equality, which underpins this representation of the Dutch as innocent bystanders, cannot hold in De Kom's narrative. Not only this radical new content of a Dutch narrative creates a fissure with traditional Dutch narratives, the form of the telling of this narrative poses challenges to Dutch literary story telling. *Wij Slaven* writes against the current of a main canonical discourse of Dutch literature, which values *Max Havelaar* perhaps precisely because it demonstrates how a Dutch author can be self-critical, tolerant, and speak for the colonies it oppresses. It's very different when the colonial subject articulates those concerns. How can the post-colonial author speak back within that literature at this time, when it's difficult to even designate it as 'literature'?[58] Pete Meel acknowledges that Andew Sidah calls *Wij Slaven* 'a literary masterpiece' but it then becomes framed in another 'us and them' discourse. Meel quotes Sida: "particularly because for the first time the book demonstrated 'that also our people have a history of resistance which can teach us a lot" (Hira 1982; vii-ix). Hira's book itself is seen within the framework of Suriname nationalism in the 1980s and its need for a "progressive Surinamer" (250). Meel observes correctly that Hira's 'our' is the Surinamer as opposed to the Dutch and as such the 'literary masterpiece' figures as a foundation text for Surinamese literature; inadvertently, that classification then takes it away from being a particular Dutch 'literary masterpiece.'[59]

Listening Activism: Maternal Vision

[58] Compare Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak" on ideas of representation and classification to exclude postcolonial voices. Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', from Cary Nelson & Laurence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1987), 271–313.

[59] In a much earlier article, Meel argued articulately that the use of De Kom's 'wij' signaled being tied to a mutual fate, and he focuses on the image of belonging that is implied in the 'wij': "De Kom gebruikt niet voor niets het persoonlijk voornaamwoord 'wij' zo veelvuldig. Hij wil er mee wijzen op de lotsverbondenheid van de bevolkingsgroepen, de gezamenlijke ontberingen in het verleden geleden en aansporen tot samenwerking, solidariteit en gemeenschapszin" (26). Peter Meel, *Groniek* 84 (1983), 24-8. Cf also Lisette Hammond who does ask the question why De Kom's book is not considered literature as she examines it within Dutch colonial writer's context, such as the Dutch classic, *Max Havelaar* by Multatuli, and also asks for a Dutch post-colonial context through which the text can find an appropriate literary frame. Liselotte Hammond, "Wie zegt dat Anton de Koms *Wij slaven van Suriname* (geen) literatuur is? Een contextuele benadering," in *75 Jaar Wij Slaven van Suriname, de turbulente biografie van een boek*, *OSO*, 1.29 (April 2010), 89-103

Instead of reading the text closely and seeing his mother suddenly appear in a vision before his major activist moment in W*ij Slaven* and in his life, the focus is on further attempts at proving him to be unreliable because he's a communist and agitator. De Kom's political leniencies and writing lead to a fervent discussion of whether he was a fully signed up communist or not. His writings for left leaning journals such as *Links Richten*, working in the unions, and his terminology (such as the "proletariat" in my opening example) lead critics to situate the book in yet another convoluted category of "us and them." His supposed communism then becomes aligned with a Surinamese nationalist agenda, rather than an overall economic non-nationalist analysis. When Sida reads *Wij Slaven* as a 'literary masterpiece,' it is situated against this background of Suriname, nationalism, and politics, something the reviewers of his book emphasize over and over again.[60] Hans Ramsoedh and Peter Sanches cite anecdotal evidence that even in Suriname during the 1950s and 60s, the book was labelled "verderfelijke lectuur van een gevaarlijke communist [pernicious reading ("lectuur' is clearly not literature) by a dangerous communist]."[61] I don't want to add this debate, which further obfuscates literary categories, only to add that African American activists were also often silenced through associations with communism. In the overlap with socialist and communist politics, especially during the 30s and 40s, many African American intellectuals had affinities with Russia and were later hauled in front of the McCarthy committee. Harlem Renaissance American football player at Rutgers University, Shakespeare actor, singer, writer and activist Paul Robeson, for example, had his passport and livelihood as international performer taken away from him by the US government.[62] Labelling De Kom as communist functions yet as another silencing strategy from a Dutch national discourse, one which somehow invalidates his reliability.[63]

His actual political strategy is one of listening and sharing. The strategy is a combination of autobiography, analysis and action, and his mother is key.[64] In the text, De

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[60] For example, in a book review of Sandew Hira's *Van Priary tot en met de Kom*, Saskia Keller classifies Hira's project as distinctly Marxist: "His argumentation is further colored by a rigidly orthodox Marxist view." And as a final killer sentence, "scholars interested in the history of Surinam had better turn elsewhere" (351). *Bijdragen tot de Taal--, Land—en Volkenkunde*, Deel 140, 2/3de Afl. (1984), 348-352.

[61] "75 jaar *Wij Slaven van Suriname*, 13.

[62] See Paul Robeson, *Here I Stand*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1958).

[63] Woortman and Boots suggest that rather than a signed communist, De Kom is a 'fellow traveller' (70).

[64] In all the criticism I have read on *Wij Slaven*, I have not found any references to his mother as his inspiration. The biography is rather sparse on his mother and also does not mention this textual vision of maternal

Kom rejects violent revolutionary activism when he listens to Surinamese complaints. In fact, the idea of setting up an 'adviesburo [help/advice center]' is not so much a communist handbook strategy at all here but originates from one of the only mentions of his mother in the book. His mother had passed away while travelling to Suriname, arriving late to support his dying mother. Clearly that trauma of not being at his mother's deathbed comes through in a vision:

> Mother, what can I do to help? My comrades are waiting for me. I have only just returned. So much has changed.
>
> It's as if mother leans over me to kiss me, just like she did when I was little, just like she did when she listened to my complaints, when the sadness already lessened because there was someone who was willing to listen to me.
>
> And suddenly I knew, I'm going to start an advice centre and listen to my comrades' complaints just like mother once listened her son's sadness. (159)[65]

Invoking his mother's assistance, De Kom develops a listening strategy, not a revolutionary activist one, which he explicitly beats away. Almost every day, he writes, Djoeko representatives try to leave guns on his courtyard, and he rejects them vehemently. "Het was mij te doen om organisatie, niet om een bloedbad" [I want organization not a blood bath](164). The visionary maternal listening strategy, however, is one of inclusion, togetherness, and finding solutions. It adds an emotional dimension not conveyed in the analytical framework of so much of *Wij Slaven*; it's not 'accusatory' at all, but inclusive.

> Perhaps I will succeed in diminishing some of that division, which was the weakness of the various ethnic groups; perhaps it won't be entirely impossible to convey that blacks, Hindustanis, Javanese, and Indians can only unite in solidarity as all of mother Sranang's sons in their battle for a dignified human life. (16)[66]

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inspiration. They do write that he is "verknocht aan zijn moeder" (closely tied to his mother) when he receives a letter in 1932 to say that she's seriously ill. See 102.

[65] Moeder, wat kan ik doen om te helpen? Mijn kameraden wachten op mij. Ik ben pas terug. Er is zoveel veranderd.

Het is of moeder zich over mij heen buigt om me te kussen, zoals ze deed toen ik klein was, zoals ze luisterde naar mijn klachten, wanneer het verdriet reeds minder werd omdat er iemand was die naar mij luisteren wilde.

En ineens wist ik, ik zal een adviesbureau oprichten en luisteren naar de klachten van mijn makkers zoals moeder eens geluisterd heeft naar het verdriet van haar jongen.

[66] Misschien zal ik erin slagen iets van die verdeeldheid uit de weg te ruimen die de zwakte was dezer gekleurden, misschien zal het niet geheel onmogelijk zijn om negers en Hindoestanen, Javanen en indianen te

Listening and solidarity form the foundations for a strategy to heal division among Suriname ethnic diversity, all with specific intertwined histories and economic suffering. His mother fuses into mother Sranang, overseeing a united battle for a dignified human existence for all the people of Suriname. The decolonization battle is not intended as a Fanonian "violent phenomenon" (27); De Kom rejects the guns. Fanon later writes another strategy for decolonization, an optimistic vision of "reintroducing mankind into the world" (84) with the 'indispensable help of the European peoples":

> This huge task which consists of reintroducing mankind into the world, the whole of mankind, will be carried out with the indispensable help of the European peoples, who themselves must realize that in the past they have often joined the ranks of our common masters where colonial questions were concerned. To achieve this, the European peoples must first decide to wake up and shake themselves, use their brains, and stop playing the stupid game of the Sleeping Beauty. [67]

De Kom's book is such a Fanonian wake-up call; it is an extension of that maternal listening and empathetic process of healing divisions between Suriname and Dutch, between 'us and them' into a 'wij,' even if it means listening to uncomfortable truths that challenge a Dutch main discourse. The problem of not fitting in into a Dutch master narrative is not De Kom's, but the unintended consequences of exclusionary strategies and categories of Dutch literary tradition; De Kom's inclusion will actively challenge and change that tradition.[68]

The way the American literary tradition has been opened up to include African American literature (Phillis Wheatley, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Nella Larsen to mention some of the most canonical writers now taught alongside Melville and James, for example) could provide a model for Dutch literature. In 1978, Robert Stepto addressed exactly the literary problems of classification and ideas about African American literature that have designated

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doen verstaan hoe slechts de solidariteit alle zonen van moeder Sranang kan verenigen in hun strijd voor een menswaardig leven.

[67] Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, transl. Constance Farrington (London: Penguin, 2001; c1967), 84.
[68] The focus on De Kom's literary intervention fits into what Stephen Small has called, a strategy looking from the back of the Big House: "The views from the back of the Big House and the cultural messages in the creative work of artists challenge the validation process in fundamental ways" (78). "Slavery, Colonialism and their Legacy in the Eurocentric University: The Case of Britain and the Netherlands," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, X. 1 (Winter 2012), 69-80.

Wij Slaven as so 'confusing.' Slave narratives are never straightforward autobiographies or fiction and bring together various documents and voices within their narratives. As Stepto argues:

> These documents—and voices—may not always be smoothly integrated with the former's slave tale, but they are nevertheless parts of the narrative; in doing so, they are at least partially responsible for the narratives being accepted as historical evidence. However, in literary terms, the documents collectively create something close to a dialogue—of forms as well as of voices.[69]

We see here some of the elements of De Kom's text, where documents and different voices are part of his own 'autobiographical' narrative, especially confusing since he writes about his ancestors as part of the 'wij' and relies on documents and oral history. Tellingly, De Kom's *Wij Slaven* has been criticized for an over-reliance of Wolbers and Stedman, in some cases even copying sections.[70] 'Copying with a difference' actually constitutes a strategy within a black cultural framework of resistance, where rebelling in the master's language takes different forms, from folk tales to jazz and hip hop, for example.[71] I will illustrate De Kom's 'copying' or 'signifying' later more specifically. Stepto's proposal of an internal 'dialogue' is very useful here; it is a strategy of telling ('telling the tale") and listening (how does one listen to the various voices?). It's the dialogue of Frederick Douglass' *Narrative* itself, for example, which puts it firmly within the American literary experience. One the hand there is the classic self-made American man, literally fighting his master, escaping slavery, and fitting almost suspiciously well into a transcendentalist mid-nineteenth century narrative. On the other hand, there are the slave songs, the magical root from medicine man Sandy that protects him from the beating, and the communal resistance of the underground railroad as well as help from his wife. These narratives operate in dialogue as it were, almost dependent on the audience in determining how one responds, taking into account publication pressures, white female northern abolitionist readership as well as a small African American readership. The text is anything but straightforward and as a literary

[69] Robert B. Stepto, *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative* (Urbana and Chicago: U Chicago Press, 1991), 3-4.
[70] Woortman and Boots misread his use of quotation completely: "Because he takes material literally from Wolbers, he doesn't succeed in changing the perspective of the white governors to the rebels" (81). (Omdat hij ook van Wolbers' boek veel tekst letterlijk overneemt, slaagt hij er niet in het perspectief van de blanke gouverneurs naar de opstandelingen te verleggen).
[71] See for example, Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988.

text it disrupts the main discourse of the classic American Renaissance. This model of dialogue, in De Kom's case the explicit narrativization of listening, provides a way into De Kom's complication of a main discourse of Dutch literature.

Reading De Kom's *Wij Slaven van Suriname* in dialogue with African American literature

De Kom's *Wij Slaven* is not a slave narrative; De Kom was never enslaved (his father and grandparents were) and he was high school educated in Suriname (Mulo). Nevertheless, it shares characteristics with American slave narratives, reconstruction texts, and even Harlem Renaissance ideas. One of the most striking rhetorical strategies of *Wij Slaven*, as I've suggested, lies in its title of 'Wij' (We). There are clearly parallels here with the slave narrative as perhaps best exemplified in Douglass' *Narrative* (1845). Douglass opens with an assertive "I," an articulation of an African American literary identity, 'written by himself," and showing his mostly abolitionist readership that self-representation is at the heart of dispelling ideas about the justification for slavery and its subsequent legacy for African American identity. Douglass still needed his literary "I" to be framed by two white abolitionists, authenticating his text. When De Kom titles his book "Wij Slaven van Suriname," he moves to the collective personal pronoun "Wij" rather than the "I" of Douglass. For De Kom, the battle for literary self-representation is one for a collective, the disparate Surinamese nation of the enslaved, of Javanese, British Indian, Marroons, Djoekoes, and other ethnic mixes. His history and analysis of Suriname stands out as a meticulously researched work, through archives and parliamentary documents as well as a deeply personal account, where he keeps emphasizing that the people he writes about are 'onze vaders' en 'onze moeders' (our fathers and our mothers). The 'Wij" works with and in juxtaposition to "Slaven," and is comparable to the way the phrase "I was born a slave" works in American slave narratives. 'Wij' provides a genealogy and a history to self-representation in De Kom's book.[72] The definition of self by the other creates a 'burden of

[72] Marijke Huisman notes that African American slave narratives translated into Dutch were read as conversion texts rather than as critiques of slavery, with no reflection on Dutch involvement in slavery until the late twentieth century. "Since the late eighteenth century, virtually no Dutch critic has thought of Ango-American slave narratives as meaningful tools to discuss or reflect on the slave trade, slavery, or its legacy" (77). "Beyond the Subject: Anglo-American Slave Narratives in the Netherlands, 1789-2013, *European Journal of Life Writing*, Vol IV, VC56-VC84, 2015, 57-84.

guilty inferiority' and the book aims to change that psychological self or 'soul' to one of 'self-respect.' The method is also clear, 'demonstrate the inaccuracy' and expose Dutch 'intentions' as devious and damaging.

One way of criticizing the text for its accuracy in its depiction of a harmful main national slavery discourse is to challenge the text's 'authenticity,' and whether it's in fact 'written by her or himself." For that reason, Douglass' *Narrative* and Wheatley's poems, for example, feature white authentication as prefaces to the text; Douglass' *Narrative* is introduced by William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips; Wheatley's poems are authenticated by eighteen Boston prominent citizens in its preface. I read the questioning of De Kom as author in similar terms. It didn't help that Jeff Last initially suggested he did more than just edit De Kom's text. However, Hira and the De Kom biography debunk that suggestion convincingly in this interventionist article aiming to expose Dutch scholars perpetuating the attack on De Kom's status as author: "Van Lier tries to discredit De Kom by suggesting that he was not the author of the book, but he offers no proof of this and relies on the assumption that a black man in the 1930s could not have written such an anti-colonial study."[73] These questions of authenticity go to the heart of challenging a civilized versus savagery rhetoric along an axis of written versus oral culture. Questioning the originality and literary quality of the actual writing plays out as another strategy of lessening black literary power, through claims of mimicry and even outright plagiarism.[74]

I realize that the African American context does not map on to the colonial world of Dutch Suriname seamlessly.[75] However, I have been struck by overlapping strategies in these quests for self-representation and the crucial role of literature in creating a voice that can speak against its othering. These voices also need to be read within the literature that has excluded them (either consciously or unconsciously) in order to create difference. There

[73] Sandew Hira, "Decolonizing the Mind: The Case of the Netherlands," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, X Issue 1, Winter 2012, 56; the discussion of authorship and especially the editorial role of Jef Last is subject to more analysis from critics. Van Kempen also emphasizes Last's influence in *de geest van Waraku* (1993) but later refer to a deathbed confession from Last that might finally have settled the argument that *Wij Slaven* is De Kom's book. (see Van Kempen, *Geschiedenis*, 174; *De geest van Waraku*, 95-96). *De geest van Waraku: Kritieken over Surinaamse literatuur* (Amsterdam: Zuid, 1993). Moors and Boots put all doubt to rest by also referring to the death bed confession of Last to children Judith and Ton. See p. 345.

[74] See for example, Hilene Flanzbaum, "Unprecedented Liberties: Re-Reading Phillis Wheatley," *MELUS*, vol. 18, no. 3, 1993, pp. 71–81. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/468067.

[75] I was struck by Van Kempen's discussion of a 1926 pamphlet written by J. Vriese where Du Bois' sequence of black civilizations is echoed to affirm a Surinamese subject. Van Kempen, *Geschiedenis*, 113.

is plenty to be said, for example, about the intended readership of these texts, bluntly put, white or black, and the consequences that has for strategies of representation.[76] That position itself reflects Du Boisian 'double consciousness,' where De Kom is both Dutch and Surinamese, a position that argues for multiplicity rather than an us and them. As Vilashini Cooppan suggests, Du Bois' double consciousness offers a 'coexistence': "Du Bois gives to postcolonial studies a figure in which, contrary to the thrust of much recent argument, nationalism and racialism did not give way to a hybrid, cosmopolitan, globalism but rather coexisted alongside and in some profound sense through it."[77] Exposing Dutch bad intentions in colonialism is part of De Kom's unique vantage point from where he can criticize on the basis of his double position. Du Bois' description of the psychological double position is just as applicable to De Kom, replacing Dutch for American: "One ever feels his twoness, —[Dutch, Surinamese]; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."

There is plenty of evidence of De Kom's identification as Dutch as well as Surinamese. One of the major questions about De Kom's life centers on the question why he joined a special cavalry forces unit in the Dutch army, the 'Huzaren', in 1921. Even his family found this puzzling and they still question why he did this as he clearly stood out as different from the other soldiers.[78] The episode appears to conflict with his pacifism and 'accusatory' role against the Dutch. However, the biography cites a comrade who suggested that unlike other soldiers, De Kom actually joined because of ideological reasons of 'patriotism.'[79] Again, as a parallel to African American acceptance as American by joining the army, De Kom joins the Dutch army to prove he is 'fully signed up' Dutch. Just as it ended in disillusionment for De Kom (apparently he wanted to tear up the old photographs), for black American soldiers it didn't end racist treatment when they returned home as veterans.[80]

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[76] See for example Henry Louis Gates' classic, *The Signifying Monkey* (London: OUP, 1988).

[77] Vilashini Cooppan, "The Double Politics of Double Consciousness: Nationalism and Globalism in *The Souls of Black Folk*, *Public Culture* 17 (2), (2005), 299-318, 307.

[78] Kwando M. Kinshasa, "From Surinam to the Holocaust: Anton de Kom, a Political Migrant," *The Journal of Caribbean History* 36.1 (2002), 44-5. "To this day, Judith has struggled to understand why her father, seemingly committed "to be revolutionary," would join the Hussars" (45); *Wij Slaven* (doc), 5.30.

[79] Woortman and Boots quote Th. Souer: ""I saw in him more a kind of patriot for his country (43)". (Ik zag in hem meer een sort patriot voor zijn eigen land).

[80] Woortman and Boots, 43. For literary treatment of this black disillusionment, see for example, Toni Morrison, *Sula* (1973), WWI veteran Shadrack and also Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952) and in particular The Veteran hospital episode.

The army episode has unintentionally come to personify De Kom as a photograph from this time is the cover for the biography, and even the 'Suriname Tentoonstelling' in de Grote Kerk in Amsterdam in 2019-20 features the photograph prominently.

To me, the story of the photography encapsulates the desire to portray De Kom as solitary, as an "I," rather the complex double consciousness "Wij" of *Wij Slaven*. It turns out the photograph is actually a cropped picture of De Kom together with a Dutch white soldier, sitting beside him, arms crossed, and their bodies seemingly touching. This is a very different portrait indeed. De Kom stands in the position of authority over the apparently Dutch younger soldier and there is no distance between them. A classic postmodern reading would say that the message only comes into being by what it leaves out, and here it leaves out a black and white story, and substitutes it for a black one; and here it's the white soldier who is 'unknown.'[81] Not a double consciousness, but a solitary "I."

And there are plenty of other examples. He participated actively in a Dutch union, and in World War II, he joined the resistance movement, was imprisoned, and eventually died in Sandbostel, a German concentration camp. As a Dutch war hero, he is still also the Surinamese civil rights freedom fighter.[82] That multiplicity is even reflected in the statue and the controversy surrounding it. The inscription reads "Anton de Kom (Suriname 1898-Duitsland 1945) Freedom fighter Resistance hero Writer Union member Activist Exile.[83]

[81] For the original picture from the family archive, see *Anton de Kom*, 45.
[82] Woortman and Boots, via some excellent research, suggest that De Kom was more active even than as writer. See chapter sixteen.
[83] Anton de Kom (Suriname 1898-Duitsland 1945) Vrijheidstrijder Verzetsheld Schrijver Vakbondsman Activist Banneling (standbeeld De Kom).

There are no commas between the various identities, denoting equal characterizations; De Kom's portrayal as an almost stereotypical heroic slave image (naked torso, muscular, slave cloth) caused controversy, since De Kom's living image is more of that of a man in a suit with a briefcase.[84] Its failure to portray that multiplicity of identity contrasts to the inscription. It is also clear that De Kom stood up against racism from within Dutch society; his son proudly recalls the time when his father defended his family and himself against a racial slur.[85] And when he famously set up office on his return to Suriname in 1933 to hear complaints about labour conditions, the Surinamese-Indian were actually represented most, and they taught him the power of passive resistance. There is never a 'return to Africa' agenda, and De Kom's book is inclusive in its discussion of all the various ethnicities in Suriname, narrativizing the treatment and betrayal of Javanese colonists and others. De Kom's cultural identity exemplifies the "Wij" of "Wij Slaven," inclusive, multiple, always resisting racial injustice. And in true Dutch style, he is pretty direct as well.

First and foremost, De Kom demonstrates that Surinamese history has been narrativized by the Dutch and his project aims to correct that colonial narrative with a counter narrative based on facts. A Dutch history 'schoolboek (text book)' lists adventurers, wars over the colonies, governors, successes of colonisation, subsequent failure of projects, and above all the failure of raising the Surinamese subject to that of a Dutch Calvinistic work ethic and 'koopman' (merchant). As De Kom puts it: De avonturier, de zeerover en de grote koopman gaan ongemerkt in elkander over" (21) [the explorer, the pirate, and the big

[84] His family pictures resemble Du Bois' pictures of the black family during the Paris Exhibition of 1900, purposely challenging ideas of uncivilized dress. The photographs are here: http://www.loc.gov/pictures/search/?st=grid&co=anedub
[85] *Wij Slaven* (part 2) 8.20; *Peace, Memories* 19.11.

merchant merge into each other unnoticed]. De Kom meticulously researches these histories and ideas, demonstrating in particular the cruelty, heartlessness, and self-interest of the Dutch in its colonisation project. In particular, he focuses on Dutch barbarity and the enslaved's dignity and civilization in spite of their brutal oppression. It is an extraordinary analysis, debunking pro-slavery arguments meticulously through a close reading of Dutch records, dissecting especially J. Wolbers, *Geschiedenis van Suriname,* 1861 for the governmental records, John Gabriel Stedman, *Reize naar Surinamen en door de binnenste gedeelten van Guiana*, 1799 and others.[86] He even narrates the Middle Passage, with reference to the Dutch slaveships, their records, rebellions, and legacy. Using the sources, for which De Kom has been criticized as noted before, is important to establish the truth of these matters; he quotes the books, as Malcolm X does, that aren't taught in school and it doesn't matter that they are written by white people. The use of these sources and in some cases the language is not a weakness, but a presentation of the facts, almost independently verified and not a matter of black and white; it's the system that needs to be exposed.

Within the African-American tradition, one of the aims is to demonstrate that the enslaved is human and not property, that the supposed biblical justification of slavery is based on misreadings of the bible (one of the reasons why slaves were not allowed to read/write), and to counter pro-slavery narratives. From the North, the question of how one could be a Christian enslaver, is answered from the South, with the infamous invocation of Noah's Ham and that slavery is actually a Christian form of civilizing barbarians; the rhetoric of Jim Calhoun in the US Senate can be quite chilling, arguing in 1837 that slavery is "a positive good."[87] De Kom also challenges the particular pro-slavery religious doctrine of the Dutch but what's unique in the Dutch pro-slavery logic is its koopmansmentaliteit [merchant/salesman/almost 'bargain' mentality]—that becomes one of the anchors for Dutch slavery (and why the abolition of slavery was so much later, he argues). The Dutch mantra, 'the solemn declaration,' underpins its operation of slavery in Suriname: "the right

[86] Sources footnoted in *Wij Slaven* (see works cited). I'm intrigued by his use of the translated, severely edited version of Stedman's *Narrative* as source; I somehow wish he could have read the original 1790 version.
[87] John C. Calhoun, "Slavery as a Positive Good," Senate Speech, February 6, 1837. *Speeches of John C. Calhoun: delivered in the Congress of the United States from 1811 to the present time* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1843), 225. "I hold it to be good, as it has thus far proved itself to be to both….Never before has the black race of Central Africa, from the dawn of history to the present day, attained a condition so civilized and so improved, not only physically, but morally and intellectually. In the meantime, the white or European race, has not degenerated" (225).

to property, i.e. the right to the use and abuse of the livestock, to the purchase and sale of our fathers and mothers, had been declared sacred and would be enforced (23)."[88] Voltaire's characterization of the particular machinations of Dutch slavery reverberates throughout *Wij Slaven* and is articulated in all its explicit detail. In this language de 'handel en koop' (trade and sale) is heilig (holy)—it's a cold definition of Dutch slavery, where business and religion are intertwined with trading in fathers and mothers. The motive of 'de koopman' barrels on, differentiating it from other colonizing nations such as the English or French, according to De Kom. "The Hollander is undoubtedly a good salesman/merchant. And why should he not increase his profit by taking advantage of those natural qualities, which God has also put in people in a black skin" (31)?[89] Slavery was a 'door God gewilde instelling' [ordained institution] asserting that they were Canaan's tribe: 'cursed be Canaan, a servant of the servants be he his brethren' (33).[90] And the religious doctrine of reverent Johan Picart from Coevorden (1660) asserts that 'These people have this natural disposition/ so that if they were to be granted freedom or lovingly cherished, they would not be good and would be impossible to govern" (33).[91] The combination of religious justification and trade (koopmansmentaliteit) characterizes Dutch slavery in Suriname.[92]

Many of the African American slave narratives expose the hypocrisy of their bible beating masters combined with a grand Southern narrative of extended families and values that is shown to be fiction; within the Dutch narrative here, value itself is devoid of moral compass; it's the sale that counts. The sale allows the horrific middle passage, the market place, the literal branding of the slave (once upon entry on the ship, once upon entry at the plantation), the use of family to procure the best slave, sexual abuse to increase property, and gruesome working conditions leading to hunger and disease. "The enslaved (our

[88] [D]e plechtige verklaring': "het recht op eigendom, dat wil zeggen het recht tot gebruik en misbruik der levende have, tot koop en verkoop van onze vaders en moeders, heilig verklaard was en gehandhaafd zou worden.

[89] De Hollander is ongetwijfeld een goed koopman. En waarom zou hij zijn winst niet verhogen door te profiteren van die natuurlijke eigenschappen, die God nu eenmaal ook in de mensen in een zwarte huid geleefd heeft.

[90] vervloekt zij Kanaan, een knecht der knechten zal hij zijn.

[91] Dese menschen [ ] zijn alsoo genaturaliseert/soo wanneer zij in vrijheydt ghestelt/of lieftalligh gekoestert werden/soo en willen zijn niet deugen en weten haar selfs niet te gouverneren.

[92] *The Dutch Atlantic*. Suggestion that that focus on finances still mars Dutch critical historicism in its examination of Dutch slavery. 76/77. The book-keeping model. "The impact of the book-keeping model on Dutch social thought should not be underestimated."

fathers) toiled the fields to enhance the wealth of the whites"(34)[93]—the economics are clear. Slavery pays in Suriname; De Kom cites records showing 300 million guilders profit in sugar, coffee, and cotton in the 1780s (43). De Kom addresses 'de Hollander' or 'the white reader' [de witte lezer] several times directly, to read about these justifications of slavery and the for profit mentality; the white reader has to listen:

> Perhaps you, white reader, have learned at school how the Mauritshuis in The Hague has been panelled with the most precious Brazilian wood. When you stand with quiet admiration before that panelling, we ask you to consider that our mothers carried this heavy burden on their heads day after day (because the Sunday was an institution that the Christian civilizations failed to implement in Suriname), hauled it over hilly terrain, through pools and swamps, always threatened by the whip that your ancestors used. (34) [94]

In contrast to the image of white female frailty and a protected position in the Dutch household, De Kom invokes 'our mothers' who carried the load for ornate Dutch civilization. The Dutch civilizers were only too keen to use the whip on the women. Is that 'your' civilization, De Kom asks? The 'for profit' analysis of slavery leaves out those Black Atlantic moments of cultural traffic, made possible by enslaved labour.[95] And here is another address that contrasts the gathering of wealth and cultural enhancement for the Dutch to what the enslavers did for Suriname:

> Nevertheless, we do have the right to ask you, Hollanders, the question: if slavery is the basis of a culture, which temples did you build in Suriname, which poems did you write, which elevated thoughts did you leave to posterity? Is it not true that you

[93] De slaven (onze vaders) zwoegden op de velden om de rijkdom der blanken te vergroten

[94] Misschien hebt gij, blanke lezer, op school geleerd hoe het Mauritshuis in Den Haag met de kostbaarste Braziliaanse houtsoorten is betimmerd. Wanneer gij vol bewondering voor die betimmering stilstaat, verzoeken wij u te bedenken hoe het onze moeders waren, die met deze zware last op hun hoofden dag in dag uit (want de zondag was een instelling , die de christelijke beschavers verzuimden in Suriname door te voeren), sjouwden over heuvelachtige terreinen, door poelen en moerassen, altijd bedreigd door de zweep die uw voorouders hanteerden.

[95] Van Stipriaan suggests "perhaps the Dutch historiography of slavery is still in the decolonial phase," and that for that reason a lack of international context and intertwining is not addressed. (82) In "Beyond Profitability: The Dutch Transatlantic Salve Trade and its Economic Impact," Karwan Fatah-Black and Mattias van Rossum, even complicate economic models of this 'for profit' analysis.

would be left empty-handed, if you had to erect just one statue in Suriname for Dutchmen, who became famous through art, literature, or thought? (42)[96]

Civilization for the Dutch only translates to barbarity. The supposed cultural legacies of civilization are nowhere to be found in Suriname. He goes on to suggest that perhaps statues could be erected for the cooks for their elaborate meals presented to the governors. De Kom's direct address implicates the white readers in their own cultural image of Dutch civilization, where 'civilization' depends on barbarity abroad, meticulously demonstrating the intertwining of the Dutch Atlantic, impacting both the enslaved and the enslavers, both in Suriname and in the Netherlands.

The supposed natural civilizing effect of slavery is undermined further in the excruciating chapter 'the punishments' [de straffen]. Pro-slavery arguments usually feature a narrative of benign mutually beneficial slavery (cf *Gone with the Wind (1939)*) and that instances of abuse were the exception. The so-called 'bad masters' defense is exposed from within the African American literary texts by demonstrations of cruelty and through an analysis of the system of slavery, which is built on the dehumanization of the enslaved. Again, we see this strategy in *Wij Slaven*. De Kom details types of punishment given on the plantation and by public officials, such as De Spaanse Bok (flogging position), cutting off of limbs, lynching, burning, whipping, and public masochistic slow deaths. De Kom sources these punishments from Dutch archival documents, and he footnotes these (mostly from Wolbers). There is not even ambiguity about whether these punishments happened and whether they were legal; the legal system itself used these, and at Fort Zeelandia the specialist warden would enact the Spaanse bok on several corners of the streets, "the four angle or seven angle Spanish block" [de vierhoekse of zevenhoekse Spaanse bokken] (46). The details of these punishments are harrowing, and again, De Kom, blames it on the Dutch quest for profit: "They considered above all the profits the Company had to make" [Zij [de blanke meesters] dachten des te meer aan de winsten, die de Companie moest maken] (49).[97]

[96] Doch wel hebben wij het recht om U, Hollanders, de vraag te stellen: indien slavernij de grondslag ener cultuur is, welke tempels hebt gij dan in Suriname gebouwd, welke gedichten geschreven, welke verheven gedachten aan het nageslacht overgeleverd? Is het niet waar dat gij verlegen staan zoudt, indien gij ook slechts een standbeeld in Suriname op moest richten voor Hollanders, die door daden van de geest beroemd zijn geworden.

[97] WIC. The West-Indische Companie controlled slavery to Suriname (the entire 'West Indies').

Not only the company business and cruelty undermined the claim for the Dutch civilizing process, the actual individual morals of the masters were often a visible signs of hypocrisy. While black family life was disparaged (property could not marry, for example) and sexual stereotypes of black sexuality prevailed, plantation masters engaged in their sexual fantasies with black female slaves. Frederick Douglass' father was rumoured to be his actual master; Harriet Jacobs was harassed by her white master, and the normality of that sexual abuse in slavery could in no pro-slavery logic be justified. De Kom again is brutally analytical about the practice:

> Then for her, at night, the second task begins, satisfying the horny lusts of her master. Not a single exemption existed for this obligation. Since the negro slaves were not considered people, neither the sacraments of the church nor civil laws applied to them. It was inconceivable for a petata (white man) that there would be something like a marriage bond between two blacks, and even the wives of slaves had to move repeatedly from their marital bed to the home of their masters. (37)[98]

Dutch language cannot describe this particular white masculine depravity; only in Surinamese is the disgust revealed, petata. Children meant an increase in property (slave law follows the mother); these relationships even further undermined the picture of the perfect Christian Dutch family instilling civilization on uncouth barbarians, as the wives of the masters reserved their most cruel punishments for their husbands' object of desire. "The European women looked for compensation of their white men's neglect in hatred, which she carried out in often inhuman cruelty against her beautiful black rivals" (38). All this evidence is then narrated through "facts [feiten]"; De Kom carefully puts in case studies, again from Dutch documents, that verify these claims. "Once again, above all, we want to offer facts as examples (38).[99] Re-reading these documents from the perspective of the victim (the supposed criminal) rather than the perpetrator offers insights into the reality of

[98] Dan begint voor haar, in de nacht, de tweede taak, het voldoen aan de geile lusten van haar meester. Geen enkele vrijstelling bestond voor deze verplichting. Daar de negerslaven immers geen mensen waren, golden voor hen nog de sacramenten der kerk, nog de burgerlijke wetten. Het voor een petata (blanke) eenvoudig niet aan te nemen, date er tussen twee zwarten zoiets als een huwelijksband bestaan zou en ook de vrouwen van slaven moesten zich herhaaldelijk van hun echtelijke leger naar de woning hunner meesters begeven

[99] De Europe vrouwen zochten vergoeding voor de verwaarlozing door haar blanke mannen in de haat, die zij jegens haar schone negerinnen-mededingsters met vaak onmenselijke wreedheid botvierden" (38). All this evidence is then narrated through "feiten"; De Kom carefully puts in case studies, again from Dutch documents, that verify these claims. "Wederom willen wij in de eerste plaats enige feiten als voorbeelden geven.

the situation. Through scholarship, traditional literary close reading-skills, and oral history from his family and peers, De Kom is able to present a post-colonial perspective with a new voice from a Suriname subject position. This re-writing of history operates as a literary device to create a different "wij" in *Wij Slaven* than the enslaved as object rather than subject. As De Kom writes:

> And the system worked. No better way to cultivate the feelings of inferiority in a race than this history education where only the sons of another people are mentioned and praised. It took a long time before I completely liberated myself from the obsession that a negro must always and unconditionally be the lesser of every white man. (50)[100]

Here is a moment of the 'I' and the conversion through reading and studying independently from the ideological 'system' of 'education' [onderwijs]. I'd like to think of De Kom as the young black dishevelled man in a hut studying French grammar in Du Bois' *Souls of Black Folk*, but here instead perusing the colonial archives in the Rijksarchief in Den Haag; he does in fact also obtain a German diploma and uses his knowledge of English as a cover for his family to hide his underground activity in the Dutch resistance.[101] This moment of decolonizing his education as transformative resembles that of Malcolm X starting with the dictionary to decolonize his education, or of Richard Wright, tricking his way into reading library books rather school texts. This moment of independent decolonial education (the transgressive moment of learning to read and write for Frederick Douglass) juxtaposed to textbook education plays a transformative role in self-consciousness and cultural freedom. While De Kom identifies with the proletariat, his revisionary educational endeavours show him to be an independent scholar, finding the 'facts' in history and employing literary analysis to produce a counter narrative. [102] Education knows no class. He uses the language of liberation where he can demonstrate that he is not 'the lesser of *any* white man [emphasis mine]."

[100] En het systeem werkte./Geen beter middel om het minderwaardigheidsgevoel bij een ras aan te kweken, dan dit geschiedenisonderwijs waarbij uitsluitend de zonen van een ander volk worden genoemd en geprezen. Het heeft lang geduurd voor ik mijzelf geheel van de obsessie bevrijd had, dat en neger altijd en onvoorwaardelijk de mindere zijn moest van iedere blanke. I've translated 'iedere' both as 'every' and 'any.'
[101] Woortman and Boots even look for the grocer's Struve where he told his family he taught English, 292.
[102] See Meel and others.

De Kom's method of speaking about many different topics resembles that of Du Bois with case studies and economic and sociological analysis. But both De Kom and Du Bois add to that scholarship, narratives of 'facts'—autobiographical, biographical, or even fiction.[103] He narrativizes life on board a slave ship, a fictional day on a plantation, writes biographical fiction of Suriname's heroes, and once even starts with 'once upon a time' [er was eens] when he describes the events of the fire in Paramaribo.[104] De Kom humanizes the facts, and through its literary narration can produce empathy in all its readers; while the sentimental novel and slave narratives often used the strategy of sentiment to influence their reader (*Uncle Tom's Cabin*; *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*), De Kom here employs Du Bois' strategy of literature as memorializing individuals, giving names to cases, and giving them stories.[105] Interestingly, Multatuli does borrow from the sentimental tradition and admits to being influenced by *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, as he writes his entirely fictional Saidjah and Adinda tale.[106] De Kom fictionalizes factual history.

Of course within American slavery, the runaway slave literally runs into trouble when leaving the plantation since the ruling inhabitants are white Americans—the path to freedom lies North. In Suriname, freedom lies in the rainforest, and the escaped slaves create strongholds and power bases; the numbers of slaves versus the numbers of whites has been raised as explanations as well for some of the brutality in Caribbean slavery. The government tries to capture the escaped slaves through so-called 'forest campaigns' [bostochten], raids on villages. In an official report, two women are captured, tortured, and eventually killed for refusing to betray the location of the village. After close reading the horrific report as he found it in Wolberts (footnote 44 in *Wij Slaven*, 173), De Kom memorializes them and makes the report into a story of particular female heroism; he presents the entire government report verbatim (60-1), with passages of punishments and resistance italicized to signal its factual reporting of crimes against humanity:

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[103] Gilroy cites Du Bois and his focus on facts in the *Dusk of Dawn*: "I was going to study the fact, any all of the facts." Black Atlantic, 115.

[104] Cf Du Bois: " Once upon a time I taught school in the hills of Tennessee" opens the chapter "Of the Meaning of Progress." (*Souls*, 46)

[105] For an analysis of 'sentimental power' and 'sympathy,' see for example Jane Tompkins' *Sensational Designs*. Harriet Jacobs will frequently address her female reader in *Incidents* ; "Pity me, and pardon me, O virtuous reader!" (55), for example. Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: written by herself* (1861)

[106] See for example, Duco Van Oostrum, "Tina's Sneeze: Female Oppression in Multatuli's *Max Havelaar*, *Dutch Crossing*, 14:42, 85-95, (1990) DOI: 10.1080/03096564.1990.11783953

Notwithstanding all the torture with fire and beatings, they could never be forced to give the rebel positions; in spite of all this torture, they just kept obstinately pointing to heaven, grabbing a lock of hair from her head, beating her fingers on her mouth and rubbing her throat, as if to indicate that she'd preferred to have them behead her, rather than that she would either by speaking or pointing to the way give any disclosure. (61)[107]

Through the use of italics, a repetition with a difference, the focus of the report changes. Rather than the Dutch story of how difficult it is to conquer the Maroons for the Molinay 'expedition' of 1711, the attention shifts to female resistance. De Kom memorializes them and presents their story with a fictional rendition, followed by this official extensive report to support its factual basis, and then presents his conclusion: "Brave Sery. Brave Flory. We will always we always remember your names with honour"[Dappere Sery. Dappere Flora. Wij zullen uw namen steeds in eerbied herdenken] (61). And instead of focusing on governors, De Kom creates narratives about Surinamese leaders: Baron, Joli Coer, Bonni on the basis of Hartsinck's description of the attacks (footnote 42, *Wij Slaven*, 173). De Kom shows this transformation directly:

> They belonged to the scum, as the whites used to call the maroons, but for us they are and remain heroes, Surinamese who had gained their dignity of captains through bravery and virtue, fighters for the rights and freedom of Surinamese slaves.
>
> Baron! Bonni! Joli Coeur!
>
> Your portraits remain in our hearts. You are ours. (83)[108]

Their portraits are now permanently exposed inside 'our hearts,' language is made visible. Here are the role models for nation building and 'self respect'in De Kom's narrative. In *Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois eulogizes Alexander Crummell, but also Josie, and many others who have been erased in 'school' history. As representative of such received national 'school'

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[107] *Niettegenstaende alle tormenten met vuur en slagen, nooyt deselve daertoe connen krijgen, blijvende deselve niettegenstaende dit alles even halsstarrig en met het wijsen naer den hemel, vatten van een lange lok haar op haer hoofd, slaen met de vingers op haer mond en wrijven op haer keel, als te kennen gevende, dat zij, liever hadde, dat men haer het hoofd afsloeg, als dat zij hetsij met spreeken ofte wijsen van de weg eenige opening van saken soude geven* (61).

[108] Zij behoorden tot het gespuis, zoals destijds de blanken en de marrons noemden, maar voor ons zijn en blijven zij helden, Surinamers die hun waardigheid van aanvoerders door dapperheid en deugd verworven hadden, vechters voor de rechten en vrijheid der Surinaamse slaven.

Baron! Bonni! Joli Coeur!

Uw beeltenissen blijven in onze harten behouden. Gij zijt van ons.

history, De Kom cites the Winkler Prins (the authoritative Dutch encyclopaedia) entry about Crommelins' treaty, and immediately fills the empty spaces:

> Even so, peace did not return completely, and even in 1772 it came to a formidable slave revolt "(72) .... Not a word about Bonni, not a syllable about Baron, not a sentence about Joli Coeur, the heroic chiefs of the Maroons. That is how a Dutch classic work informs its readers about the history of a Dutch colony. (72)[109]

Clearly, De Kom uses his literature to eulogize the heroes of Suriname as a contrast to their nameless erasure in Dutch history.[110] By not naming, by using no language (not a word, syllable, or sentence), Dutch encyclopaedic 'fact' erases the Suriname subject from history; De Kom's literary intervention provides a language and literature for that erased subject. In fact, Stedman admires Boni so much that builds his hut on the plantation Hope in the manner of Boni and he praises Boni throughout; in other words, the History books know about Boni's leadership but consciously silence it.[111] De Kom's creation of stories about 'our mothers and out fathers' has clear echoes with the story telling of the anonymous in African American literature, the ones who couldn't write down their stories. Douglass sums up the life of his grandmother in a harrowing sentence, where the dashes convey an unwritten life, for example: "She stands—she sits—she staggers—she falls—she groans—she dies—."[112] Du Bois movingly describes Josie and her dreams of a better life; he teaches her in a transformed school house while on break at Fisk University to steer progress into 'the dark belt.' Returning ten years later to Alexandria, the promise of this intelligent and independent girl is summed up by "Josie was dead" (51). And he later muses, "How shall man measure Progress there where the dark-faced Josie lies? (53).[113] But inclusion of their stories actually provides a literary record, far beyond an anonymous, nameless existence.

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[109] Geheel keerde de rust daardoor niet terug en zelfs kwam het in 1772 tot een geduchte slavenopstand" (72)….Geen word over Boni, geen letter over Baron, geen zinnetje over Joli Coeur, de heldhaftige opperhoofden der Marrons. Zo licht een Nederlands standaardwerk zijn lezers in over de geschiedenis ener Nederlandse Kolonie.

[110] It is important to realize that Boni's military leadership also earned the praise of Stedman, especially in the uncensored 1760 version. See especially chapter 14. For Moors and Boots to suggest that *Wij Slaven* is 'selective' in its portrayal of Boni and that that somehow undermines the text because it doesn't address Boni's own violence ignores Stedman's assessment of Boni (177).

[112] *Narrative of Frederick Douglass*, written by himself. In *The Oxford Frederick Douglass Reader*, ed. William L. Andrews, 56.

[113] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 53

After the analysis of slavery, De Kom moves to the Dutch abolition of slavery on the first of July 1863—he argues persuasively that the Dutch combination of merchant mentality [koopmansgeest] and bureaucracy leads to this embarrassingly late date (England 1833; France 1848).[114] In addition, the Dutch planters tried to resist any type of self-governance, similar in structural terms to the problems with reconstruction in the American South. Within this moment, De Kom suggests, lies the failure of Dutch post-slavery vision; he actually compares the manumission of slaves in Suriname and North America, both of which happened in 1863 (footnote 73, *Wij Slaven*, 175). In the American South, the North occupied Southern territory and the Freedman bureau offered new free enslaved the right to vote, education, and office. Southern plantation owners were prosecuted (and then later pardoned by President Andrew Johnson in 1866). Many free blacks migrated North. Du Bois's analysis of the Freedman bureau and reconstruction again revises a received history of 'the black' not being 'ready' and in fact demonstrates great successes in spite of severe circumstances. After the compromise and withdrawal of 1877, reconstruction politics appeared to fail as the Jim Crow laws reconfigure black and white life yet again. I provide this context for post-slavery because it's one of the main differences with Suriname, where migration appears only as an option to the Netherlands (taken by the planters who could afford it), where instead of prosecution, the planters and owners received compensation per enslaved of 300 guilders; as part of the 'bargain' for freedom, the ex-slaves had to work on a plantation for another ten years as a kind of indentured servant. According to De Kom, Dutch history asserts that after slavery, the Suriname economy collapses: "Axiom: Suriname costs the Netherlands millions and the black is lazy" [Axioma: Suriname kost Nederland milljoenen en de neger is lui] (142). De Kom examines that premise by looking where those millions disappeared to. Projects designed by Dutch scientists and bureaucrats who had never been to Suriname; salaries and bribes, and nothing to the Surinamese worker; in some cases, the money disappeared without record. Again, in meticulous research, De Kom is able to debunk the economics through archival research; he concludes by repeating that axiom, demonstrating its ideological characterization of the Surinamer:

[114] Cf Oostindie with regards to abolition. "The Dutch, both at home and in their colonies, were among the last to participate in this debate. Their record is appalling. Their abolition of the slave trade was enforced by Britain. The abolition of slavery itself was endlessly postponed; and when it finally came, in 1863, it included a ten-year period of state supervision over the freed population" (15).

> Thus the millions disappear for Suriname for the benefit of a few capitalists, while the vast majority of the population is in poverty. And in schools in the Netherlands the small children already read the axiom: the black is lazy and Suriname costs us millions. (150)[115]

De Kom's analysis argues for the devastating lasting effect of not challenging Dutch versions of post-slavery reconstruction in Suriname. The ideological axiom is passed on in the schools and so forms the basis for perceptions of 'the black' and of its colony Suriname in Dutch culture.[116]

Even personal identity is caught up in the web of Dutch merchandise [koopmanswaar] and efficient bureaucracy—there is no language of freedom; even his name is part of a Dutch bargain ('koopje'):

> It is understandable that the committee, which naturally did not have a son of our race as member, only looked at the interests of rich wealthy slave owners and stipulated that they would receive compensation of three hundred guilders, indeed three hundred guilders, for every released slave. Now it was just a priority to make an inventory of the stock as soon as possible. More slaves meant more cash. Committees were set up to register the slaves, to determine their age (approximately), and additionally as part of the bargain to honour them with a Dutch name, so that Jansen, Krijnsen, de Kom, and such beautiful names came in for Jaü, Codjo, Abenibo and the like, which we inherited from our fathers. (102)[117]

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[115] Zo verdwijnen de miljoenen voor Suriname ten bate van enkele kapitalisten, terwijl het overgrote deel der bevolking in armoe verkeert. En in Nederland op de scholen lezen reeds de kleine kinderen het axioma: de neger is lui en Suriname kost ons miljoenen; see footnote 80 in *Wij Slaven*. De Kom cites de West-Indische Gids of January 1934.

[116] Even as I write this, variations of this axiom can still be heard. Minister Blok's statement on Suriname as a 'failed state,' comes to mind. https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/voorzichtige-excuses-van-blok-na-uitspraken-over-suriname-en-xenofobie~b9bf741e/

[117] Het is begrijpelijk dat de commissie, waarin natuurlijk geen zoon van ons ras zitting had, alleen keek naar de belangen der rijke vermogende slavenbezitters en bepaalde dat deze voor elke vrijgelaten slaaf een schadeloosstelling van driehonderd gulden, zegge driehonderd gulden, zouden ontvangen. Nu ging het er maar om zo snel mogelijk de voorraad te inventariseren. Hoe meer slaven, hoe meer duiten. Commissies warden ingesteld om de slaven te registreren, hun ouderdom (bij benadering) vast te stellen, en hen op de koop toe met een Hollandse naam te vereren, zodat Jansen, Krijnsen, de Kom, en dergelijke schone namen in de plaats kwamen voor Jaü, Codjo, Abenibo en dergelijke, die wij van onze vaders erfden

His name is literally an afterthought in a sub-clause, and itself an erasure of familial identity over one of Dutch business and bureaucratic registration.[118] Apparently, the new names were meant to "cover the tracks" of the enslavers.[119] His identity resembles that of the slave bill, the three hundred guilders repeated as equivalent to the Surinamer's value, but only in Dutch economical exchange, complete with Dutch re-naming for registration. As Nimako and Willemsen articulate forcefully and lucidly, abolition is not emancipation.[120]

De Kom finishes his analysis with the autobiographical section on his return to Suriname. To his surprise, he receives a celebrity welcome as 'Nawang biedjie man!' ('als groot man, ' 158). In spite of his peaceful activism, inspired by mother listening strategy, he's imprisoned and a riot follows (Feb 7 1933); after dubious proceedings, he's banned to the Netherlands never allowed to return. The book ends with a longing to return to 'Sranang my 'land of fathers' [vaderland]:

> Once I hope to see you again.
>
> On the day where all misery will be erased from you. (169)[121]

De Kom would never return, passing away in the German concentration camp Sandbostel in 1945. However, his book stands as a work that fights against erasure and provides Suriname with a prominent place in Dutch cultural history, one that juxtaposes its narrative of benign non-involved slavery, a place of cultural freedom and tolerance. Instead, *Wij Slaven* exposes Dutch involvement at all levels, the intersections of Dutch merchant mentality, religion, and bureaucracy, and its participation in dehumanizing sexual and physical atrocities.

At the same time, he presents a Surinamese history of heroism and self-respect through his writings. Kom offers an interruption in Dutch literature and cultural history, similar to the interventions of African American writers. He challenges the "wij' of Dutch representation, inclusion, and differentiation. This intervention does not reassert an 'us and them' rhetoric. The literary achievement of *Wij Slaven* counters 'us and them' by looking again what "Wij' entails; *Wij Slaven* is part of the Dutch and Surinamese cultural narrative,

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[118] Kinshasa suggests that De Kom was "a reversal of their slave owner's surname, Mok" (35). The biographers have been unable to find evidence of a planter called Mok. They do agree that De Kom believed this to be the case for his last name (21).

[119] See *the Dutch Atlantic* for a fascinating analysis and how the key to restore the link between enslaver and enslaved was done by Humprey Lamur in *Family Names and Kinship of Emancipates Slaves in Suriname* (2004). Seee143-4.

[120] *The Dutch Atlantic*, especially chapter 4, Abolition without Emancipation, 87-112.

[121] Sranang mijn vaderland. Eenmaal hoop ik u weer te zien. Op de dag waarop alle ellende uit u weggewist zal zijn.

one that encompasses Du Boisian double consciousness. His mother's vision emphasizes listening and sharing, as his literary work does. Wij, as the most inclusive subject, narratologically ranges from reader to fictional character. It is very different from the "I' of the traditional slave narrative and exemplifies De Kom's passion for the diverse collective from the Hussars, to the Trade Union, to Surinamese labour leader, to writing pamphlets for the Dutch resistance movement. Dutch slavery and its colonial regime are part of Dutch cultural identity and therefore part of the "Wij," not to be erased or written as 'other' in 'us and them' terms. His book invites us to listen, to his vision of his mother, listening to her own son. The journey on de Rensselaer to Suriname traverses all these outposts of home and difference; he returns on the same ship. In Black Atlantic literature, Gilroy proposes, the images of the ships are always complex: "Ships immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artefacts" (4). When De Kom and the black faced white stoker exchange looks of mutual recognition on board, the ship bridges cultural positions in a moment of togetherness, 'wij.'

When I went to De Kom's statue on a rainy day in June 2018 I was struck that there were two statues, one I knew, De Kom proudly staring over his 'own' square, the Anton de Kom plein in Amsterdam Southeast, on top of the steps, an image of power, defiance, and strength, portrayed with naked torso, in slave cloth, and shield. And then there was another, much smaller statue of a man in a suit, arms folded, also staring defiantly over het plein. Aware of the controversy surrounding the statue, I jumped to the conclusion that this smaller statue was also De Kom, put there as a counter image of De Kom, the scholar, the man in the suit.[122] After doing research, I learnt that it was actually a statue of Martin Luther King, made by Airco Caravan, a transatlantic Dutch Amsterdam-New York based artist. On her website, she describes her project as follows:

> To keep his dream alive, 50 identical statues were placed from Washington to Amsterdam on locations that refer to slavery and places that let us remember how

[122] See Chapter 17 in *Anton de Kom*. Here is a timeline of the controversy (in Dutch): https://www.buitenbeeldinbeeld.nl/Amsterdam_ZO/Anton%20de%20Kom.htm

important it is to end racism and fight for equality, regardless of gender, religion and race. History may not be forgotten.[123]

I think my mistaken assumption about a double De Kom statue illustrates the range of his "Wij." I was focused on De Kom himself and the duality of his representation, which in a way is still singularly focused; what Airco Caravan's MLK statue achieves, instead, is to provide a much wider field of representation that goes far beyond the individual and finds a 'Wij' across boundaries, one that is united in making sure that 'history may not be forgotten.' By placing De Kom in the context of African American Civil Rights, she has placed De Kom next to an African American and black Atlantic cultural discourse, which I done here from a literary perspective. A literary analysis opens up *Wij Slaven* to see multiplicity, where one re-examines source texts, questions categories of identity, analyses processes of abolition and emancipation, and suggests literary models for post-colonial practice in a Surinamese-Dutch context, and in which there is also space for his mother, the black faced-stoker, and the unnamed Hussar.

[123] https://www.mlk50.nl/

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